

Aging Agenda for Houston/Harris County

"Eighty-one year old, Mrs. Carew lives alone on a fixed income and is a recipient of the Meals-on-Wheels program. She is semi-paralyzed due to post-polio complications and is confined to a three-wheel scooter to ensure mobility. The portion of her limited income not regularly spent on medications is currently stressed by current utility expenses."

-Jewish Community Center

Facts The projected growth of Harris County's elderly population mirrors many national and state trends. In 2000, there were 252,895 adults 65 years old and older in Harris County, accounting for 7.4% of the total population (Source: Care for Elders). By 2036, adults over 65 will number 865,000 and make up 16% of the population. By 2040, the number will climb to 985,000: three times the current number.

Challenges and Opportunities Significant growth in the number of older adults can certainly pose challenges for our community. It can strain the health and human service systems as the number of persons with chronic diseases and infirmities grows. Many elders like Mrs. Carew struggle to meet basic needs. Some may have health coverage but no transportation to get to a doctor. Many are at risk of social isolation, depression, physical illness and declining function.

"Nearly 5,000 older adults have called 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline in the past 10 months; approximately 15% of them needed support beyond basic information and referral to successfully access needed services."

-Care for Elders

Health and human services will face increasing demand, and there will be greater competition for funds and resources. The age wave creates a tremendous opportunity for agencies serving the elderly to collaborate and leverage each others' unique advantages and resources.

Having an increased number of older adults in our midst can also present a tremendous asset if the community is able to effectively respond to their needs and preferences. As baby boomers age and are re-inventing retirement, they offer the community tremendous resources, skills, and wisdom. The aging network and its constituents must remain cognizant of this in planning for the future.

Vision The Aging Agenda will provide the road map for Houston/Harris County to become an elder friendly and elder prepared community—a community that:

- provides appropriate and affordable housing for vulnerable older adults
- fosters meaningful connections for older adults with family, neighbors, and friends
- mobilizes resources to facilitate "living at home"
- promotes accessibility to affordable transportation, healthcare and other needed services
- provides for lifelong learning and volunteer opportunities

"I ran into a group of senior citizens who had just finished their first computer lesson. They were excited, talking eagerly about what they had just learned. One of the women came up to me and told me she loved the class, 'fue una cosa muy bonita (it was a very beautiful thing)!"

About four weeks later I saw her at the Cultural Festival the YWCA was having for its seniors. I asked her how her classes were going, marvelously she responded. "I will be 81 years old this Sunday, my daughter has an old computer that I want so I can practice what I am learning each week", she informed me. We are seeking a computer for her use because lifelong learners like her must be encouraged!"

-YWCA of Houston

Purpose The Agenda will facilitate informed decision making and:

- clarify elder care issues faced by the community
- provide a focus for future service direction and policies
- highlight effective preventative measures
- educate the community about the issues facing older adults and family caregivers
- propose innovative ideas for program implementation
- identify areas for services and systems improvements

Partners Coordination and planning efforts among partners is making this agenda a reality. Several partners have taken leadership roles including:

- AARP (Texas)
- Area Planning Advisory Council (APAC)
- Care for Elders
- Houston Department of Health and Human Services
- Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging
- Jewish Community Center
- Texas Adult Protective Services
- Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
- United Way of Greater Houston
- Y.W.C.A. of Houston

Common Concerns Community partners identified eight areas of common concern:

- Basic Needs
- Housing Options
- Mobility & Transportation
- Health & Well-Being
- Safety & Security
- Civic Engagement, Volunteerism & Employment
- Access to Quality Care
- Recreation, Culture, Lifelong Learning, Life Satisfaction & Spirituality

Engaging the Community Input from a broad range of stakeholders will be sought as the Aging Agenda is developed and the priorities for action are established. Once complete, it will serve to help policy makers, elder service providers, elected officials, public authorities, community and higher education leaders, healthcare systems, insurance companies, businesses, advocates, potential funders, faith-based institutions, seniors and caregivers, to coordinate their efforts to make Houston/Harris County an elder friendly community.

The input of stakeholder issues will be reflected in the planning and development of the Aging Agenda, and will be used to enhance the understanding of the needs of elders in Houston/Harris County. Input will be sought from stakeholders throughout the development of the Aging Agenda.

Next Steps

- Release of the Aging Agenda on May 16, 2008, during a celebration of Older American's Month
- Partnering agencies will continue to collaborate with other organizations to implement developed strategies
- Other community leaders will be engaged to develop policies, participate in advocacy, and fund programs

The success of the Aging Agenda depends on strong partnerships, and there are many ways to make a difference. Please join us as we work together to make Houston an elder friendly community.

